

Message Text

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USIA-15 NIC-01 ARA-16 OMB-01 EB-11 TRSE-00 SAJ-01

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8645

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 10179

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH ELECTIONS: GENERAL BILLOTTE'S VIEWS

1. SUMMARY: ON APRIL 25, GENERAL PIERRE BILLOTTE, UDR DEPUTY, HEAD OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FRANCO-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP GROUP, AND PRESIDENT OF FEDERATION OF LEFT-WING GAULLISTS, CAME TO EMBASSY TO GIVE ME HIS ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PROSPECTS. HE HAD SEEN CHABAN-DELMAS JUST BEFORE, AND PLEAD CHABAN'S CASE, CLEARLY WITH LATTER'S AUTHORIZATION. WITH EITHER MITTERRAND OR Giscard in ELYSEE, BILLOTTE FEARS A DIVIDED FRANCE. ONLY CHABAN CAN HOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE TOGETHER. SOVIETS AND ARABS PREFER CHABAN. JOBERT WILL SUPPORT HIM AND CHABAN WILL FOLLOW SUBSTANCE OF POMPIDOU-JOBERT FOREIGN POLICY. HOWEVER, ATTITUDE TOWARD US WOULD BE MORE FRIENDLY, WITH FULL AND TIMELY CONSULTATIONS
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CARRIED OUT INFORMALLY AND DISCREETLY. THEY COULD

NOT BE FORMALIZED IN PUBLIC DOCUMENT, LEST FRENCH
BELIEVE THEIR INDEPENDENCE COMPROMISED. END SUMMARY.

2. ADVERTING TO HIS LONG FRIENDSHIP AND ASSOCIATION
WITH THE US, BILLOTTE SAID IT HAD BEEN HIS CUSTOM
TO DISCUSS FRENCH DOMESTIC SCENE WITH AMERICAN
AMBASSADORS IN "TROUBLED TIMES." HE MENTIONED
SEVERAL INSTANCES, INCLUDING ONCE IN 1958 --
WHEN "FRANCE WAS ON THE VERGE OF CIVIL WAR" -- WITH
AMORY HOUGHTON. THE RESULT, HE SAID, WAS A PUBLIC
STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT EISENHOWER TO EFFECT THAT HE
"LIKED GENERAL DE GAULLE."

3. ONCE AGAIN, BILLOTTE IS TROUBLED BY FRENCH
SITUATION. FRANCE HAS LONG HISTORY OF "FRAGILITY."
A RARE EXCEPTION -- WHEN STABILITY HAD REIGNED -- WAS
1958-1968. AGAIN, FOLLOWING MAY 1968 UPHEAVAL,
STABILITY WAS RESTORED UNTIL 1972 -- WHEN POMPIDOU
BEGAN HIS SLOW DECLINE. PROOF OF THIS DECLINE IN
JUDGMENT AND POLITICAL ACUMEN WAS THAT HE
SUCCUMBED TO BLANDISHMENTS OF Giscard AND "OTHER
CONSERVATIVES," WHOSE BUSINESS CLIENTS WERE UNHAPPY
WITH CHABAN'S ADVANCED "NEW SOCIETY" SOCIAL PROGRAMS,
TO FIRE CHABAN. CHOICE OF MESSMER TO SUCCEED
CHABAN CONFIRMED POMPIDOU'S FAILING STATECRAFT.

4. DISMISSING OTHER NINE CANDIDATES AS NOT SERIOUS,
BILLOTTE THEN ANALYZED CANDIDACIES OF MITTERRAND,
Giscard d'Estaing and Chaban-Delmas.

5. BILLOTTE SAID HE HAD KNOWN MITTERRAND FOR MANY
YEARS. CAPTURED IN 1940, MITTERRAND OBTAINED HIS
RELEASE FROM GERMAN POW CAMP BY AGREEING TO RETURN
TO FRANCE TO ORGANIZE COLLABORATIONIST STUDENTS,
WHICH HE PROCEEDED TO DO IN EARLY OCCUPATION YEARS.
JUST PRIOR TO LIBERATION, HE JOINED THE RESISTANCE.
AFTER THE WAR, HIS POLITICAL CAREER MOVED FROM
MILITANCY ON THE RIGHT TO THE CENTER AND NOW INTO
AN ALLIANCE TO GOVERN WITH THE COMMUNISTS. THIS
CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED EXTENT OF HIS POLITICAL
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CONVICTIONS, STRESSED BILLOTTE. MITTERRAND CLAIMS
HE CAN HANDLE THE COMMUNISTS, WHICH DEMONSTRATES HE
IS EITHER NAIVE OR A LIAR. BILLOTTE BELIEVES THE
LATTER. IF ELECTED, MITTERRAND WILL HAVE TO GIVE
SEVEN OF SIXTEEN MINISTERIAL POSITIONS TO COMMUNISTS,
WHICH WOULD PERFORCE INCLUDE IMPORTANT POSTS. THIS
WOULD ENABLE THE COMMUNISTS TO TAKE CONTROL OF
IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF THE STATE'S APPARATUS. THIS

"TAKEOVER", COMBINED WITH THEIR SUPERBLY ORGANIZED PARTY MILITANTS, PARA-COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS, ETC., WOULD BE THE BEGINNING OF COMMUNIST TAKEOVER SIMILAR TO SUBVERSION OF EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES 25 YEARS AGO. MITTERRAND WOULD BE POWERLESS TO PREVENT THIS. FURTHER, THESE EVENTS WOULD ONCE AGAIN DIVIDE FRANCE, WITH AN ASSURED HOSTILE (IF NOT VIOLENT) OPPOSITION REACTION. ECONOMIC RESULTS WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC,

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WITH ENORMOUS CAPITAL FLIGHT, AND INEVITABLE "TOTALITARIAN" COUNTER-MEASURES OF MITTERRAND GOVERNMENT -- RIGID EXCHANGE CONTROLS, BLOCKED ACCOUNTS, ETC.

6. BILLOTTE CHARACTERIZED GISCARD AS RESOURCEFUL

AND INTELLIGENT, BUT NOT SUFFICIENTLY SEASONED FOR THE PRESIDENCY. UNFORTUNATELY, BECAUSE OF HIS BACKGROUND AND HIS IMAGE (IN PART, UNFAIR), GISCARD APPEARED TO THE WORKING CLASS AS PROTECTOR OF ESTABLISHED PRIVILEGE AND BUSINESS INTERESTS. HIS CAMPAIGN SOCIAL PROGRAMS ARE "PASSE" AND REVEAL ALL TOO CLEARLY TO THE WORKERS THAT GISCARD WILL NOT STAND UP FOR THEIR INTERESTS. BILLOTTE SAID HE UNDERSTANDS ATTITUDE OF THE WORKING CLASS, SINCE HE REPRESENTS A DISTRICT IN THE "RED BELT"

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AND IS IN CONSTANT CONTACT WITH WORKERS, UNIONS, SHOP STEWARDS, ETC., IF ELECTED, GISCARD'S POLICIES WOULD PROVOKE DIVISIVENESS IN FRENCH SOCIETY, WITH RESULTANT STRIKES, FACTORY SIT-INS, CAPITAL FLIGHT, ETC.

7. IN BILLOTTE'S VIEW, ONLY CHABAN-DELMAS COULD, AS PRESIDENT OF FRANCE, RECONCILE DIVERSE ELEMENTS OF FRENCH SOCIETY AND MAINTAIN STABILITY, SOCIAL PROGRESS AND ORDERLY ECONOMIC GROWTH. AS RESULT OF HIS ADVANCED "NEW SOCIETY" SOCIAL PROGRAMS, PARTICULARLY HIS POLICY OF CONCERTATION WITH THE UNIONS, CHABAN WOULD BE ABLE TO HOLD THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF FRANCE TOGETHER.

8. AS FOR FOREIGN POLICY, ALTHOUGH ALL THREE MAJOR CANDIDATES PROCLAIM FRIENDSHIP FOR THE UNITED STATES, ONLY GISCARD AND CHABAN ARE "TRUE FRIENDS" OF AMERICA. HOWEVER, WARNED BILLOTTE, GISCARD, AND CHABAN PARTICULARLY, ARE SENSITIVE TO FACT THAT 65 OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE SUPPORTS POMPIDOU-JOBERT FOREIGN POLICY. LESS THAN AN HOUR BEFORE COMING TO SEE ME, BILLOTTE SAID CHABAN TOLD HIM THAT HE SUPPORTED JOBERT'S POLICY AND WOULD MAINTAIN THE POMPIDOU-JOBERT LINE IF ELECTED. (IN FACT, JOBERT DID COME OUT ON MORNING OF APRIL 26 IN SUPPORT OF CHABAN.) HOWEVER, CHABAN TOLD BILLOTTE HE WOULD CARRY OUT FRANCE'S FOREIGN POLICY MORE GRACIOUSLY AND WITH A GREATER SENSE OF COOPERATION AND FRIENDSHIP WITH THE U.S. CHABAN PARTICULARLY EMPHASIZED TO BILLOTTE THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD COUNT ON "FULL AND TIMELY" CONSULTATION AND CONCERTATION. THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE DONE INFORMALLY AND DISCREETLY, HOWEVER. IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR CONSULTATIVE ARRANGEMENTS TO BE FORMALIZED IN PUBLIC DOCUMENTS, FOR THIS WOULD BE INTERPRETED BY THE FRENCH PEOPLE AS "BETRAYAL OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE."

9. AS A RESULT OF HIS LEFT-WING GAULLIST TIES,
BILLOTTE IS IN CONTACT WITH EASTERN EUROPEAN EMBASSIES.
HE IS ALSO IN CONTACT WITH ARAB MISSIONS. THEIR
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UNANIMOUS ORDER OF PREFERENCE FOR PRESIDENCY IS:
CHABAN, GISCARD AND MITTERRAND. SOVIETS AND OTHER
EASTERN EUROPEANS DO NOT WANT MITTERRAND AS PRESIDENT
OF FRANCE FOR FEAR IT WOULD PROVOKE RETURN TO "COLD
WAR" ATMOSPHERE IN EUROPE. SOVIETS ARE PARTICULARLY
ATTACHED TO THE PRESENT PEACEFUL EQUILIBRIUM. THEY
PLACE PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE ON RELATIONS WITH U.S.
A MITTERRAND PRESIDENCY COULD HAVE A DESTABILIZING
EFFECT, STIMULATING FEAR IN WEST GERMANY, WITH THE
POSSIBLE RESULT THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE
OBLIGED TO ARM THE FRG WITH ATOMIC WEAPONS. ON THE
OTHER HAND, THE SOVIETS DO NOT WISH A WESTERN
EUROPE DOMINATED BY THE U.S., FOR THIS WOULD BE AN
ADVANTAGE TO THE AMERICAN SIDE IN ITS
RELATIONS WITH MOSCOW. HOWEVER, THEY PREFER PRESENT
STABILITY, WITH SOME U.S. INFLUENCE TO REVOLUTIONARY
SITUATION LEADING TO A COMMUNIST WESTERN EUROPE,
WHICH IN ADDITION TO DESTABILIZING EFFECTS WOULD
PREVENT ACHIEVEMENT OF SOVIET ECONOMIC/TECHNOLOGICAL
GOALS.

10. ADVERTING TO PRESS SPECULATION THAT GISCARD IS
THE PREFERRED CANDIDATE OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, I
STRESSED THAT U.S. POSITION ON FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS IS ONE OF STRICT NEUTRALITY, LOW-PROFILE
AND NON-INTERFERENCE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF
FRANCE. IT WOULD NOT BE IN U.S. INTEREST TO GET

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INVOLVED; IN FACT, SUPPORT FOR A CANDIDATE COULD BOOMERANG AGAINST HIM. HOWEVER, I SAID I KNEW CHABAN-DELMAS AND BELIEVED I HAD A GOOD RAPPORT WITH HIM. BILLOTTE SAID HE AGREED SUCH WAS THE RIGHT ATTITUDE FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT TO MAINTAIN. HOWEVER, HE SAID, IF THE RUMOR ABOUT U.S. SUPPORT FOR GISCARD WERE TO GAIN IMPORTANCE, IT WOULD PERHAPS BE USEFUL FOR THE U.S. TO DENY OFFICIALLY AND EXPLAIN ITS POSITION. I THOUGHT AT PRESENT THIS SEEMED UNNECESSARY AS IT MIGHT HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT OF THE ONE INTENDED, CALL ATTENTION TO THE RUMOR AND FEED SPECULATION. IN ANY EVENT, WE BOTH AGREED IT WAS NOT A PROBLEM FOR THE MOMENT.

11. ELECTION PROSPECTS: BILLOTTE SAID HE
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BELIEVED CHABAN WOULD WIN, BUT HE WAS NOT SURE. IT WOULD BE VERY CLOSE. GISCARD IS SOMEWHAT AHEAD IN THE POLLS, BUT CHABAN'S CAMPAIGN IS NOW GETTING UNDERWAY. WITH 400,000 MILITANTS, FEDERATIONS IN ALL DEPARTMENTS, SEVERAL HUNDRED PROVINCIAL MEETINGS ORGANIZED, CHABAN WOULD NOW BEGIN TO ROLL. THE MAJORITY OF DISSIDENT GAULLISTS (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CHIRAC) -- AT LEAST 75 -- HAD RALLIED TO CHABAN'S CAUSE. HE COULD BE COUNTED ON TO CONDUCT A VIGOROUS CAMPAIGN.

12. COMMENT: FOREGOING CONVEYS BILLOTTE'S OWN OPINIONS. OUR ANALYSIS OF THE THREE CANDIDACIES WILL FOLLOW IN DUE COURSE.

IRWIN

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